

Learning lessons

*An independent review of
Indigenous education in
the Northern Territory*



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ESL training

It was beyond scope of the review to examine ESL teacher credentialling efforts in professional development and teacher training programs. However, several relevant concerns emerged concerning available ESL training.

- It is not usually available at the undergraduate level but is usually taken as a post-graduate qualification.
- Such undergraduate ESL or Indigenous education modules that exist tend not to be compulsory units but elective.
- ESL methodologies are designed to meet the needs of migrant students in metropolitan areas and not Indigenous students.
- As teachers will confront the bulk of their Indigenous ESL challenges on the ground, ESL expertise is needed at the local level.

In the main, it would appear that ESL preparation at universities is limited.

What is still missing is the system-level planning and strategic analysis aimed at ensuring that every teacher recruited and every teacher already in place has some component of professional development in ESL within a short time of commencing work. This requires a critical analysis, as part of the Indigenous Education Recruitment and Retention Strategy, of

- how many staff currently employed by NTDE have no ESL qualifications, and the plans for ensuring they are covered within a minimum period of two years
- how many have limited or obsolete training, and the plans for updating their skills
- how many are in place with excellent skills and practices who should be recognised for their exemplary practice and used to tutor others.

ESL skills are an important requirement for effective education in most, if not all, Indigenous schools. The NTDE has negotiated the availability of a two-year part-time postgraduate Certificate in Indigenous ESL teaching, which has just commenced with twelve intakes in the first semester of 1999. As the service purchaser, the NTDE should also negotiate with the tertiary sector to increase the scope and adequacy of ESL training for trainee teachers at the undergraduate level.

However, graduate teachers who are recruited into the NT require immediate ESL methodologies so they can quickly become effective in Indigenous classrooms. The review received evidence that for teachers new to the bush, interaction with other experienced teachers is currently the only immediate avenue for learning how to operate in the multilingual cross-cultural environment they find themselves in. This interaction is often made difficult given the workloads and pressures of remote area teaching. NTDE needs to provide intensive short-course training in ESL, at either the time of induction or close to it. This training need not be provided in-house but could be accessed from the private sector or sponsored if the market does not already exist. This would provide the skills that many teachers told the review they desperately need and would supplement the two-year postgraduate certificate recently introduced at NTU. Training in working with hearing impaired children is also critical.